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Death and the Maiden in Joyce Carol Oates's "Where Are You Going? Where Have You Been?"

Martha E. Widmayer

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- 1 In a *New York Times* review of the film version of "Where Are You Going? Where Have You Been?," Joyce Carol Oates reveals that her story was influenced by a *Life* magazine account of "a tabloid psychopath known as 'The Pied Piper of Tucson,'" as well as by "the hauntingly elegiac song 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue,' ... dedicated to Bob Dylan." In the same review, Oates speaks of an earlier draft of the story with "the rather too explicit title 'Death and the Maiden': 'Like the medieval German engraving from which my title was taken the story was minutely detailed yet clearly an allegory of the fatal attractions of death (or the devil). An innocent young girl is seduced by way of her own vanity; she mistakes death for erotic romance of a particularly American/trashy sort' (1,22).
- 2 Despite Oates's intriguing comments regarding her original title and the German engraving, scant attention has been given to the author's remarks concerning the early draft. Rather than explore "the fatal attractions of death," critics tend to debate the questions of whether Arnold Friend is "a symbolic Satan" (Wegs 70) or a psychopathic killer modeled after the "Pied Piper," Charles Schmid, (Coulthard 505-10) and whether the events of the story take place in the "real world" or only in the protagonist's mind. As Nancy Bishop Dessommes writes, "critics cannot seem to decide whether Connie... has had a dream, seen the devil, or simply been seduced and possibly murdered by a psychotic intruder" (433). While all of these interpretations have merit, they may leave the reader with too many unanswered questions. For example, why should a fifteen-year-old girl who willingly sacrifices herself for her family be condemned to be carried away, presumably to hell, by a devil? On the other hand, if Arnold is not a supernatural figure but a psychopathic killer, why does he not act like one by simply abducting Connie when she refuses to go with him? Furthermore, if the stranger is thoroughly human, how are

we to account for Oates's decision to invest the character with special knowledge of the girl's family and friends, as well as a "mesmeric influence on Connie" that suggests "he represents a superhuman force"? (Urbanski 202). And if "the whole terrifying episode involving Arnold Friend" is "a dream-vision or 'daymare'—one in which Connie's intense desire for total sexual experience runs headlong into her innate fear of such experience" (Rubin 109), what is the point of her surrendering herself to Friend to save her family? Then again, if Connie's experience is not a dream, who or what is Arnold?

- 3 Though such questions may never be answered satisfactorily, following Oates's cue by interpreting "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been" in relation to the Death and the Maiden motif may provide insight into the story. Like the caller in Emily Dickinson's "Because I Could Not Stop for Death,"¹ which may itself owe something to the Death and the Maiden tradition, Arnold Friend comes unexpectedly. However, in Oates's story, Death is no 19th century gentleman suitor arriving in a carriage with a chaperone to take a willing lady for a drive. Instead, Death rumbles up in a yellow, convertible jalopy, dressed like a hip teenager of the fifties and sixties, accompanied by what at first seems just another teenaged boy lost in his music. In place of the polite courtship of Dickinson's poem, Oates gives the "fatal attraction" of Death and the Maiden overtones of "erotic romance of a particularly American/trashy sort" – overtones that soon become violent, considering Connie's natural unwillingness to accept her inescapable union with her visitor. As I read the story, Oates draws upon the Death and the Maiden motif, but portrays Death not merely as a terrifying presence, but as a Friend. The teenager's fear of her imminent death, which accounts for Arnold's resemblance to rapist and serial killer, must be replaced by resignation; more important, with the help of Friend, her soul, like that of Everyman, is given the opportunity to make its journey accompanied by a "good deed."
- 4 The Death and the Maiden motif to which Oates refers has its origins in the "dance of death." Believed by some historians to have been performed during times of war, famine, or plague, this strange dance featuring a leader dressed as a skeleton eventually captured the imagination of medieval painters, sculptors, and engravers, as well as preachers and poets (Cohen 32, 35-40). By the late Middle Ages, the dance of death appeared in murals and woodcuts depicting a "macabre skeleton or grinning corpse" conducting the living to their graves: "Arranged hierarchically from the Pope and the emperor to the beggar and the child, the living engage in a dialogue with Death... Usually, a frame of some kind explains the dance and places it in an eschatological context: the dying are to be judged..." (Goodwin 3-4). Sarah Webster Goodwin writes that, practically from the outset, medieval artists portrayed Death as "confronting, seizing, or seducing individuals"; "Although... Death and the Maiden arguably has a life of its own as a literary and artistic motif, some variation on it also appears as an element in most dances of death" (24). One early example of the Death and the Maiden motif, painted on a cemetery wall in Basel, shows a healthy-looking young woman, standing outdoors on a spring or summer day, embraced from behind by a grinning skeleton. Like the fresco, the dialogue that accompanies the painting gives erotic overtones to the maiden's impending union with Death:

Death to the Maiden.
Maiden! your lips so fresh and red
Must with paleness overspread;
You've danced with boys in joy and glee;
Now comes the time to dance with me.

The Maiden's Reply.
 Alas! thy dread hand holds me fast,
 My mirth and joy are all now past;
 No more in dance I'll take delight,
 To all I say: a long good night. (*Todtentanz der Stadt Basel* fig. 27)

- 5 Another Basel painting presents a finely dressed, long-haired young woman who is gazing into her mirror when she is seized by a running male figure. Covered with flesh except for his hooded skull, he tells her of their impending dance:

Death to the Lady.
 My lady, leave your toilette's care,
 And for a dance with me prepare;
 Your golden locks can't help you here,
 What see you in your mirror clear?
 The Lady's Reply
 Oh! horror! What is this? Alas!
 I've seen death's figure in my glass:
 His dreadful form fills me with fright. My heart grows cold and senseless quite.
 (*Todtentanz der Stadt Basel* fig. 20)

- 6 Death's reference to the lady's "golden locks" suggests the kind of warning against the vanities of life found in a number of medieval illustrations of the dance of death (Grossinger 142). A woman's concern for her hair might attract the attention not only of the seducer, Death, but of the devil, as in a 1493 woodcut that "illustrates the dangers of looking into the mirror, and the potency of long, flowing hair, symbolic of pride and vanity, in calling up the devil" (Grossinger 15).
- 7 In "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?," Oates calls attention to her protagonist's vanity from the outset of the story, where the reader is told of Connie's "habit of craning her neck to glance into mirrors, or checking other people's faces to make sure her own was all right" – much to her mother's annoyance: "Stop gawking at yourself. Who are you? You think you're so pretty?" she would say." To Connie, her prettiness is "everything." She seems particularly vain about her "long dark blond hair that drew anyone's eye to it, and she wore part of it pulled up on her head and puffed out and the rest of it she let fall down her back." On the Sunday Friend comes to her house, grooming her hair has consumed Connie's entire day, taking precedence over going to church or attending a barbeque with her family: "One Sunday, Connie got up at eleven – none of them bothered with church – and washed her hair so that it could dry all day long in the sun." Like the maiden who fixes her gaze on the mirror, Connie, for whom her teenage hangout is a kind of "sacred building" and its music "like music at a church service," is too absorbed with the vanities of this world to concern herself with the possibility of one to come. When she sees the car carrying Arnold and Ellie approaching the house, her first impulse is to check her hair: "Her heart began to pound and her fingers snatched at her hair, checking it, and she whispered, 'Christ, Christ,' wondering how bad she looked." Rather than a prayer, her Sunday invocation of the name of Christ is an expletive, prompted by her vanity over her hair.
- 8 Goodwin points out that, by the Renaissance, the dance of death had been linked to the *Vanitas*, "the woman who sees Death in her mirror":

A woman at her toilette is enclosed, private. She is likely to be alone; if Death intrudes, it is in the form of a servant, a gentleman caller, or, simply, a face in the mirror. The drama of such a moment arises from the woman's sudden self-awareness, her recognition of her vanity. Alternatively, she may fail completely to

be aware: she may not see Death in the mirror, and the servant or visitor plays the crafty flatterer or seducer. (129)

- 9 For a time at least, Connie, "the vain, spoiled daughter of middle-class parents" (Urbanski 200), is as lacking in self-awareness as she is ignorant of the nature of her "gentleman caller." Initially, Arnold Friend is nothing more to Connie than a mirror for her vanity, as underscored by the fact that he wears metallic glasses that "mirrored everything in miniature." When he first asks if she'd like to go for a ride, she uses her hair to try to entice him further: "Connie smirked and let her hair fall loose over one shoulder." Later, when he's removed the glasses, he uses her source of pride against her, speaking as if she's groomed her hair in expectation of him, her lover: "No, your daddy is not coming and yes, you had to wash your hair and you washed it for me. It's nice and shining and all for me. I thank you sweetheart,' he said with a mock bow..."
- 10 If Arnold Friend is intended by Oates to represent the death-figure from the traditional dance of death, it is not surprising that he also resembles not only a seducer, but a trickster and devil. Goodwin writes that, from the Middle Ages on, Death has typically been presented as "the wages of sin," "a consequence of the Fall": he is "the agent of a moralizing force, but he is not, or is only indirectly, an agent of God":

an image such as that of Death and the Fool in the Paris 1486 version [of the dance of death]... shows us Death's true colors: holding his prey by the hand, Death grins out at us foolishly, and looks us right in the eye. Death is a fool, a trickster whose features are perpetually a mask, and whose identity, which multiplies rapidly, grounded in nothing, reveals the nothingness of our own identity. Death is not only morally ambiguous, but embodies the essential ambiguity and mobility of the self. (28)
- 11 Christa Grossinger explains that the mask worn by the death-figure often reflected in some way the living person he intended to lead to the grave: in woodcuts by Hans Holbein the Younger, for example, an empress is taken away by Death in the form of a female lady-in-waiting, while Death masked as a maid dresses a Countess in a necklace of bones, and a nun at prayer is to have her life extinguished like the candle that Death, in scarf and apron, snuffs out at the altar (142-43). As we might expect, many illustrations of the Death and the Maiden motif present the skeleton disguised as the kind of suitor to which the young lady in question might be attracted, such as a caped waltzing partner or an elegantly dressed gentleman at an opera (Goodwin Fig. 23, 32).
- 12 Such illustrations suggest that the guise assumed by Death is a projection taken from the mind of the maiden or other victim. Similarly, Oates's Arnold appears in the kind of guise most likely to arouse the interest of a rock-and-roll era teenager in the throes of rebellion against her mother and everything her ordinary, compliant, domestically-oriented sister represents: "[June] was so plain and chunky and steady that Connie had to hear her praised all the time by her mother and her mother's sisters. June did this, June did that, she saved money and helped clean the house and cooked and Connie couldn't do a thing, her mind was filled with trashy daydreams." As if drawn from those trashy daydreams, Arnold's mask is that of a hip young rebel of the Elvis/James Dean variety who makes his first appearance to Connie as "a boy with shaggy black hair" in a gold, jalopy convertible outside her teenage hangout. In the tradition of the dance of death, "produced to warn human beings of the sudden appearance of Death, and of their total impotence in his grip" (Grossinger 141), Arnold comes unexpectedly to Connie, seen and heard by her alone, wagging his finger, smiling, and leaving no doubt of his assurance that "I'm gonna get you, baby." The ambiguous words, suggestive of sex or death, cause Connie to turn

away, but she is clearly attracted to Arnold's mask of cool, seductive, mysterious, and faintly dangerous teenager.

- 13 For a time, Arnold's guise allows Connie to suppress the truth about her impending fate. However, the closer she comes to death, the more difficulty she has maintaining the illusion. When she first sees Arnold from the doorway of her house, Connie "liked the way he was dressed, which was the way all of them dressed." Later, however, when she asks, "Where're we going?," he initially answers by removing his glasses. Rather than help Connie conceal the truth, he begins to reveal it by showing her what Oates's description suggests are imitation eyes, glasslike chips, set in white hollows like those of a skull:

He looked at her. He took off the sunglasses and she saw how pale the skin around his eyes was, like holes that were not in shadow but instead in light. His eyes were chips of broken glass that catch the light in an amiable way. He smiled. It was as if the idea of going for a ride somewhere, to some place, was a new idea to him.

- 14 As Death, Arnold is an abstraction, and Connie's destination is not a place, but union with death, as he indicates to her when she first sees him at the restaurant. Referring to that encounter, Arnold asks Connie, "Didn't you see me put my sign in the air when you walked by?" and explains by drawing "an X in the air, leaning out toward her... After his hand fell back to his side the X was still in the air, almost visible." "My sign," as Arnold calls it, suggesting death's power to cancel out a life, causes her to realize that, while she recognizes his clothing and smile as like those of a teenaged boy, "these things did not come together."
- 15 Frightened when she realizes he's considerably older than he appeared, Arnold "grinned to reassure her," and she sees that "His teeth were big and white." What Christiane Hertel describes as "the always smiling Death—the 'fixed grimace' and the 'smile that never fades from thirty-two white teeth,' as Baudelaire writes in 'Danse Macabre'" (94)—is suggested not only by Arnold's skeleton-like teeth, but by Oates's repeated references to his smiles and grins. As Arnold's conduct becomes increasingly stranger and more threatening, his smile, like his disguise, ultimately fails to entice Connie, who comes to sense the bone white horror beneath the mask: "Then he began to smile again. She watched this smile come, awkward as if he were smiling from inside a mask. His whole face was a mask, she thought wildly, tanned down onto his throat but then running out as if he had plastered make-up on his face but had forgotten about his throat." Even his feet, perhaps fleshless like a shrunken skeleton's and, thus, too small for boots, suggest the disguise conceals a grotesque reality.²
- 16 Initially, Connie is drawn to Arnold not only by his teenager's disguise and language, but through music. Marie Mitchell Oleson Urbanski writes, "The recurring music... while ostensibly innocuous realistic detail, is in fact, the vehicle of Connie's seduction and because of its intangibility, not immediately recognizable as such" (201). Musical instruments, often pictured in illustrations of the dance of death, are, of course, among the "more traditional attributes" of the motif (Goodwin 30) as in fifteenth century German woodcuts that show companions of skeletons jumping "wildly in the air to the music of a ghostly orchestra equipped with various types of wind instruments and drums" (Clark 106). In keeping with the motif of the dance, Arnold's appearances are always accompanied by music. Connie first sees him just outside the teenage hangout, within hearing distance of "the music that made everything so good: the music was always in the background like music at a church service, it was something to depend on." In the days to come, when she thinks about boys she met, she seems haunted by a vague

memory of Arnold, an abstract extension of the sexually-charged excitement her music represents: "But all the boys fell back and dissolved into a single face that was not even a face, but an idea, a feeling, mixed up with the urgent insistent pounding of the music and the humid night air of July." When Arnold drives up to her house, she has been listening for an hour and a half to "hard, fast, shrieking songs" – the same program of music that plays on Ellie Oscar's transistor radio, which he holds close to his ear. Like the music at the restaurant that serves as background to teenage mating rituals, the music from Ellie and Connie's radios "blend together" and play throughout this dance of death as Arnold speaks in a "singsong way" and "tapped one fist against the other in homage to the perpetual music behind him."

- 17 In his role as seducer, Arnold seems at first intent on making Connie's union with him or, put another way, her journey from this world, as easy and painless as possible. Yet, he consistently sabotages the smoothness of the transition by revealing his other-worldly nature, beginning with his first words to Connie upon his arrival at her house, "I ain't late, am I?" The implication that she has a date with this figure, whom she does not or does not wish to recognize, immediately arouses her suspicions: "Who the hell do you think you are?" When she hesitates to go for a ride with him because she has "things to do," he answers in a way that suggests she is repressing her recognition of her fate: "Connie, you ain't telling the truth. This is your day set aside for a ride with me and you know it." His mention of her name again puts her on the defensive, but rather than provide a reasonable explanation of this knowledge, he tells her, "I know my Connie," and wagging his finger the way he did at the restaurant, adds, "Ellie and I come out here especially for you."
- 18 Arnold's wagging gesture helps Connie recall seeing him at the restaurant and temporarily stirs her interest in him as a boy; however, Arnold sees to it that her ease is short-lived. Saying, "I know your name and all about you, lots of things," he goes on to tell Connie he knows where her parents and sister are, how long they'll be gone, who she was with the night before, and names her friends and acquaintances. This information has the effect of, again, arousing her suspicions, as does his drawing of an X in the air; she finally realizes that Arnold and Ellie are much older than they first appeared. It is as if Arnold intentionally manipulates Connie into seeing behind his mask of teenaged boy.
- 19 Her visitor's mysterious knowledge about her family and friends does not unduly alarm Connie. However, when he tells her, "I'll come inside you where it's all secret and you'll give in to me and you'll love me," she is plainly terrified:

"Shut up! You're crazy!" Connie said. She backed away from the door. She put her hands against her ears as if she'd heard something terrible, something not meant for her. "People don't talk like that, you're crazy," she muttered. Her heart was almost too big now for her chest and its pumping made sweat break out all over her. She looked out to see Arnold Friend pause and then take a step toward the porch, lurching.
- 20 Arnold's promise to come inside Connie reflects the sometimes flagrantly erotic nature of the Death and the Maiden artistic motif,³ where death and sexual union are one. Presenting himself as "lover," Arnold is seemingly trying to coax the young girl to submit to him without a struggle so their union will be "nice"; however, on another level, his language seems intentionally designed to frighten Connie and enkindle her resistance.
- 21 When she threatens to call the police, Arnold repeatedly tells her he is not going to come in the house after her: she is to come out to him. "I ain't made plans for coming in that

house where I don't belong but just for you to come out to me, the way you should. Don't you know who I am?" Arnold's reluctance to enter a house "where I don't belong" is hardly consistent with the conduct we might expect from a human psychopathic killer, but it does have precedence in the dance of death tradition. Goodwin points out that many early illustrations of the motif as well as the later ones of Hans Holbein use a "threshold metaphor" in the form, for example, of arches and walls, to suggest the transition between life and death. She writes of Holbein:

In several of his woodcuts visual thresholds serve also as symbolic ones: Death leads the Child out the door of his family's house... , and Death yanks the Mendicant Friar away from a stately Renaissance gate towards a stormy and ragged exterior. Indeed, from the first image of the expulsion from Eden..., Death lurks for the living just outside their protective enclosures. (42)

- 22 As Christina Marsden Gillis observes, once Arnold arrives at the house, "the delineation of space becomes a matter of crucial concern. Connie's refusal to move down off the step bespeaks her clinging to a notion that walls and exact locations offer the protection of the familial order" (68). Of course, no protective enclosure can hold Death back. In illustrations of the dance of death, architectural forms are merely "metaphors for life's fragile order: Death draws the Abbess from her abbey, slips in the Physician's door and the Astrologer's window, and even invades the enclosed space of the Duchess' bed"; walls and doors "frame the living without protecting them..." (Goodwin 42-43). Arnold tells Connie as much when she tries to lock the door of the house: "... anybody can break through a screen door and glass and wood and iron or anything else if he needs to, anybody at all and specially Arnold Friend." Later, he suggests that the house which Connie believed to be her refuge is useless compared to his power: "The place you are now—inside your daddy's house—is nothing but a cardboard box I can knock down any time. You know that and always did know it."
- 23 Here, as elsewhere, Arnold suggests that Connie knows perfectly well who he is, what he's capable of, and why he's come, but refuses to acknowledge his identity, presumably because she cannot bring herself to let go of life and admit to herself that she is soon to die. Many critics assume that Connie is indeed to die, but only after she rides away with Arnold and Ellie who will rape and murder her. However, much about the story suggests that Connie's death is a process that begins prior to Arnold's arrival at the house. In the tradition of *Death and the Maiden*, where Death often comes at the height of life, Connie first sees Arnold Friend when she has been doing what she most enjoys, spending an evening at the shopping plaza and the drive-in restaurant with her friends. As Connie is exiting the restaurant with Eddie, her face is "gleaming with a joy that had nothing to do with Eddie or even this place; it might have been the music." Just as she is rejoicing in life, she encounters Arnold: "She drew her shoulders up and sucked in her breath with the pure pleasure of being alive, and just at that moment she happened to glance at a face just a few feet from hers." Her sucking in the full elixir of life seems to foreshadow her last intake of breath.
- 24 Later in the story, when she chooses to remain alone at home to dry her hair, Connie "sat with her eyes closed in the sun, dreaming and dazed" until she opens her eyes to find that she is confused and disoriented: "she hardly knew where she was... The asbestos 'ranch house' that was now three years old startled her—it looked small. She shook her head as if to get awake." Because "It was too hot," she goes into the house, sits on her bed, and sings along with the music on the radio for an hour and a half until the announcer tells his listener "to pay real close attention to this song coming up!":

And Connie paid close attention herself, bathed in a glow of slow-pulsed joy that seemed to rise mysteriously out of the music itself and lay languidly about the airless little room, breathed in and breathed out with each gentle rise and fall of her chest.

25 At this point in the narrative, Connie seems to have undergone an abrupt change: suddenly she is lying still in the "airless little room," her pulse and respiration apparently slow, despite the excitement generated by the music. It is the sound of Arnold's car that causes her to sit up, "startled because it couldn't be her father so soon."

26 If Connie is dying when Arnold arrives, death has come so suddenly to this fifteen-year-old, it is not surprising that she clings tenaciously to life, unable to accept her fate. Arnold's hints at the truth (e.g., "This is your day set aside for a ride with me and you know it"), are initially lost on Connie, whose fear or vanity blinds her to the fact that Arnold and Ellie might be anything other than teenaged boys who've come to take her for a Sunday ride. However, as Arnold comes closer, removing his glasses, revealing his mask, and Connie sees that the face of Ellie is "the face of a forty-year-old baby," her world is turned upside down: "Connie felt a wave of dizziness rise in her at this sight and she stared at him as if waiting for something to change the shock of the moment, make it all right again." When she tells Arnold and Ellie that they "better leave," Arnold responds to her resistance by telling her not to fool around with him and putting his glasses on his head, "carefully, as if he were indeed wearing a wig." Like her recognition of Ellie's peculiar brand of immortality, Arnold's gesture tugs her further away from the world she has known:

Connie stared at him, another wave of dizziness and fear rising in her so that for a moment he wasn't even in focus but was just a blur, standing there against his gold car, and she had the idea that he had driven up the driveway all right but had come from nowhere before that and belonged nowhere and that everything about him and even about the music that was so familiar to her was only half real.

27 The more "half real" the world of material fact becomes to Connie the more she struggles to cling to the familiar details of that world—missing curtains, dishes piled up, a sticky substance on the table— even though she has begun to realize that her protective enclosure offers no protection from what waits just outside the threshold:

She was panting. The kitchen looked like a place she had never seen before, some room she had run inside but which wasn't good enough, wasn't going to help her. The kitchen window had never had a curtain, after three years, and there were dishes in the sink for her to do— probably—and if you ran your hand across the table you'd probably feel something sticky there.

28 When Arnold asks her, "Don't you know who I am?," Connie's tenuous link to the world, represented by the once familiar kitchen, becomes more fragile: "Her eyes darted everywhere in the kitchen. She could not remember what it was, this room."

29 Soon after this point in the story, Arnold mentions an old neighbor lady of Connie's. The young girl's horrified reaction suggests her dawning awareness that she is soon to share the old lady's fate:

"Leave me alone," Connie whispered.

"Hey, you know that old woman down the road, the one with the chickens and stuff—you know her?"

"She's dead!"

"Dead? What? You know her?" Arnold Friend said.

"She's dead—"

"Don't you like her?"

"She's dead—she's—she isn't here any more—"

"But don't you like her, I mean, you got something against her? Some grudge or something?"

30 This peculiar exchange reflects the radically different perspectives on death of Connie and Arnold. Startled by the mention of the old woman, Connie attempts to distance herself from the neighbor, wanting to believe that the dead can have nothing to do with her. To Arnold, the fact that she's dead has no bearing on the old woman's continued existence. Furthermore, Arnold's implicit association of Connie with the old woman arouses the young girl's fear of and hostility towards death. Since Arnold cannot understand why one should feel this way towards death, he assumes Connie must have "some grudge or something" against her neighbor, who, to him, is still very much in the present tense.

31 The dying Connie's terror of death is expressed in her struggle against the inevitable as she grasps her last lifeline—the telephone. With Arnold, or Death, so near, her body is weak, despite the strength of her will to live:

Something roared in her ear, a tiny roaring, and she was so sick with fear that she could do nothing but listen to it—the telephone was clammy and very heavy and her fingers groped down to the dial but were too weak to touch it. She began to scream into the phone, into the roaring. She cried out, she cried out for her mother, she felt her breath start jerking back and forth in her lungs as if it were something Arnold Friend were stabbing her with again and again with no tenderness.

32 The sexual overtones of the "stabbing" sensation of the air in her lungs suggests that, as Connie's death approaches, she experiences something of the union promised by her "lover," Arnold. But the violence of the assault is mercifully brief: "After a while she could hear again. She was sitting on the floor with her wet back against the wall." When Arnold orders her from outside the screen door to replace the phone, she obediently does so, but her resistance to death is still strong: "deep inside her brain was something like a pinpoint of light that kept going and would not let her relax. She thought, I'm not going to see my mother again. She thought, I'm not going to sleep in my bed again. Her bright green blouse was all wet."

33 Her meeting with Arnold has caused Connie to undergo a marked change in her attitude towards her home, her mother, and her father. Early in the story, her father is described as a weak, cowardly or indifferent nonentity who never rises to her defense in her arguments with her hated mother:

Their father was away at work most of the time and when he came home he wanted supper and he read the newspaper at supper and after supper he went to bed. He didn't bother talking much to them, but around his bent head Connie's mother kept picking at her until Connie wished her mother was dead she herself was dead and it was all over. 'She makes me want to throw up sometimes,' she complained to her friends.

34 When Connie begins to see Arnold for what he is, her final image of her father, "quiet and bald, hunched around so that he could back the car out," is transformed, so that he becomes the defender and patriarchal figure he has not before this been for his younger daughter: "If my father comes and sees you—" she tells Arnold; "my father's coming back. He's coming to get me." Similarly, once she confronts Death, Connie's final impression of her mother, riding away "with a look that was still angry and not at all softened through the windshield," changes so that she becomes the loving protector for whom the young girl cries out for and longs to see again.

- 35 This is a different Connie from the earlier one, a rebellious teenager whose "greatest challenge in life is to escape parental supervision long enough to sneak across the highway to the... forbidden zone... Unlike her dull and obedient sister June, Connie thrives on risk" (Dessommes 435). The teenage hangout allows Connie not only to exercise her independence from authority, but to flirt and, if the opportunity arises, make out with boys. In fact, she is about to enjoy sexual pleasure in an alley with Eddie when she sees Arnold for the first time. This image of Connie is consistent with that described by Goodwin as occurring "with almost boring regularity in later versions" of the dance of death: "Repeatedly, the woman transgresses by challenging masculine authority, and by neglecting domestic virtues for a worldly vanity. When she seeks control over her own sexuality, when it expands beyond the circumscribed norm, Death comes to punish her" (Goodwin 129).
- 36 Oates, however, breaks away from the conventional morality of nineteenth-century versions of the female dance of death. Connie is more than a passive, deserving victim and Death is less a figure of retributive justice than a friend who is determined to help the girl prepare her soul for the journey beyond the life she has known. Rather than maintain his mask of attractive teenaged seducer, Arnold repeatedly sabotages the seduction by arousing Connie's suspicions and fear to the point where she is terrified of him. Arousing her fear seems part of Arnold's plan to give her the opportunity for self-sacrifice. The greater her horror of him, the greater her heroism in offering herself up to save her family. Thus, despite his power to take her when he wishes, Arnold insists that she come out to him willingly; if she does not, he says, he'll take her family: "This is how it is, honey: you come out and we'll drive away, have a nice ride. But if you don't come out we're gonna wait till your people come home and then they're all going to get it." Three times more, Arnold tells Connie her family will suffer if she doesn't willingly come to him. As if to increase Connie's level of fear, between each threat, Arnold sounds more menacing and crazed. Ellie Oscar, who but for his music, has been silent throughout the dialogue between Arnold and Connie, helps to escalate her terror by twice asking Arnold if he wants him to pull out the phone cord. Arnold's response makes it clear he wants Connie to keep her date with death of her own volition: "This little girl's no trouble and's gonna be nice to me, so Ellie keep to yourself, this ain't your date—right?" Arnold's fifth and final threat against her family comes when Connie, too weak to phone the police, seems to be experiencing her final moments of life:
- She felt her pounding heart. Her hand seemed to enclose it. She thought for the first time in her life that it was nothing that was hers, that belonged to her, but just a pounding, living thing inside this body that wasn't really hers either.
- "You don't want them to get hurt," Arnold Friend went on. "Now get up, honey. Get up all by yourself."
- She stood.
- 37 Once Connie stands and turns towards him, she has made her decision to save her family rather than to struggle any further to save herself. Arnold responds to this decision by praising Connie for her courage and revealing that she is a better person than are the other members of her family, who do not know her for who she truly is and would not have sacrificed themselves as she has:
- "Now come out through the kitchen to me honey and let's see a smile, try it, you're a brave sweet little girl and now they're eating corn and hot-dogs cooked to bursting over an outdoor fire, and they don't know one thing about you and never

did and honey you're better than them because not a one of them would have done this for you."

- 38 Before moving towards the waiting embrace of Arnold Friend, Connie pushes her hair, symbol of her vanity, out of her eyes, then, as if spirit has parted from flesh, watches "this body and this head of long hair moving out into the sunlight where Arnold Friend waited."
- 39 Goodwin writes that "the moment of Judgment... is implicit in nearly all the early dances of death, and brings with it the Christian temporal and typological framework" (57). Read within this framework, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" is less a terrifying tale of death than a story of redemption. With the spoken syllables of his peculiar name drawn out, Arnold Friend is "Our Old Friend"—not the enemy, but an ally, who helps Connie realize her full heroic potential. As Oates said of her protagonist, "Connie is shallow, vain, silly, hopeful, doomed... but capable nonetheless of an unexpected gesture of heroism at the story's end" (1). Like Everyman, Connie is unprepared for the sudden appearance of Death, but where she is going may well depend upon where she has been. Given the chance to ready her soul, she goes to her grave accompanied by her good deed.
- 40 How successful her preparation has been is perhaps hinted at by the name of Ellie Oscar. This mysterious character with "the face of a forty-year-old baby," may serve much the same purpose as Immortality in Dickinson's "Because I Could Not Stop for Death." His link with immortality is suggested by his name and the gold jalopy in which he sits. When, like Arnold Friend's, the spoken syllables of Ellie Oscar's name are drawn out, we are given "Elijah's car"—the fiery chariot associated with the prophet Elijah's ascent to heaven. Oates offers no assurance that Connie is bound for heaven; however, the text does suggest that the young girl is entering a new life, a bright, unfamiliar reality of "vast sunlit reaches of land... so much land that Connie had never seen before and did not recognize except to know that she was going to it."

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NOTES

1. Brenda O. Daly briefly considers the poem in relation to "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?," pointing out that Oates alludes to Dickinson in her commentary on the story in the *New York Times*. See "An Unfilmable Conclusion: Joyce Carol Oates at the Movies," *Journal of Popular Culture* 23 (Winter 1989): 101-114.
2. As A. R. Coulthard has demonstrated, the similarities between Arnold's appearance and that of Charles Schmid, who wore make-up and stuffed his boots with newspaper so he might appear taller, are too striking to be accidental. If Oates chose to depict Death in the guise of a serial killer, this would be consistent with the dance of death tradition in which a skeleton might appear riddled with cholera or dressed as a revolutionary (Goodwin 19; fig. 29), an enemy soldier (Cohen 38), or a prostitute (Hertel 95), thus representing a manner of death greatly feared in a particular time and place. Especially beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, the leader of the dance of death could well be artistically rendered as a psychotic, serial killer.
3. Among the many examples of this is a sixteenth-century circular relief carving by Hans Schwartz, which is described by Christa Grossinger as depicting a rotting corpse pressing a nude woman to his chest: "she looks away and with her hands begs him to let her go, but he looks at her intently from hollow eye-sockets, and his jaws are locked and thrust towards her with unyielding determination. Thus, life and death are joined together, and Death in his activity takes on a macabre life." p. 145.

ABSTRACTS

Dans une interview, Joyce Carol Oates admet que, pour une version précédente de « Where Are You Going? Where Have You Been? », elle s'était inspirée d'une gravure médiévale allemande intitulée « La jeune fille et la mort ». Dans cette nouvelle, Oates présente la mort en la personne d'Arnold Friend, jeune adolescent passionné de musique qui, accompagné d'Ellie Oscar, roule dans un vieux tacot jaune. Il rencontre Connie qui, comme la jeune fille de la légende allemande, est trop occupée par les futilités de ce monde pour penser aux offices de l'autre. Comme dans la légende, Connie est d'emblée attirée par Friend dont le physique n'est que la projection de ses propres désirs. Cependant, au fur et à mesure qu'elle s'approche de lui, Friend se défait de ses atours et l'incite à le voir tel qu'il est. Son savoir de l'au-delà est révélé à Connie de manière à ce que l'union entre la jeune fille et la mort revêt parfois un caractère franchement érotique. Si dans la légende traditionnelle la mort vient pour punir la jeune fille rebelle, chez Oates la mort vient en ami (*Friend*) qui donne à Connie la possibilité d'aller à la rencontre de l'au-delà par le biais d'une action généreuse. Le temps du jugement qui se cache au fond de toute danse macabre arrive lorsque, terrifiée, Connie se sacrifie volontiers pour sauver sa famille. Interprétée comme une version moderne de « La jeune fille et la mort », la nouvelle d'Oates apparaît moins comme la rencontre d'une jeune fille avec un meurtrier en série qu'une allégorie de la rédemption.

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